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CJ in Brief



Gang Involvement Among San Diego County Arrestees

Data from the SANDAG Substance Abuse Monitoring Program

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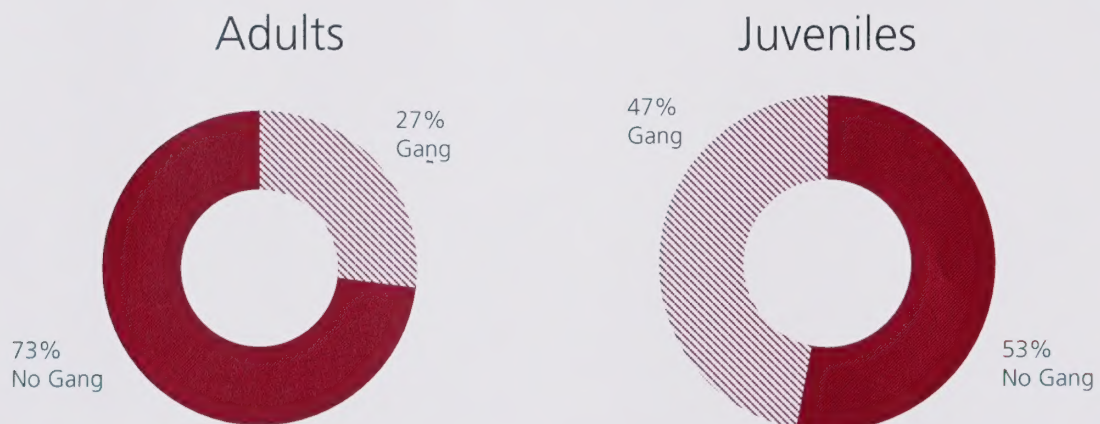
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Introduction: The nexus between gangs and crime is commonly accepted and well documented in the research. While crime is at record lows, gang activity and membership have remained an ongoing concern for many jurisdictions across the country. Because of this, in 2008, SANDAG added a short addendum to the standard Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) interview. This CJ in Brief outlines results of feedback provided by adult and juvenile arrestees in 2013 and completes the series of publications for this project from this most recent calendar year.

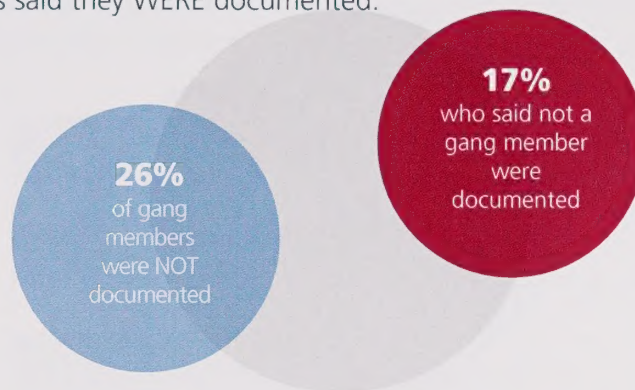
- + About one in four adults and half of juveniles interviewed in local detention facilities as part of the SAM Program in 2013 report some type of current or previous gang membership or association.



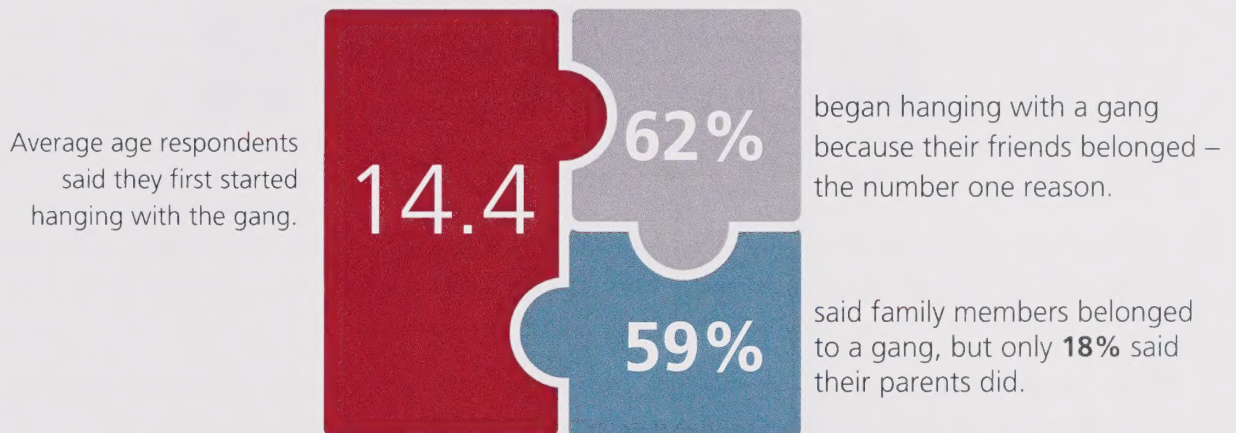
- + There were fewer documented gangs and gang members in the San Diego region in 2014, compared to 2013, according to the San Diego Police Department.



- + Around one in four arrestees who reported membership said they were NOT documented as gang members by law enforcement; and almost one in five who were not members said they WERE documented.



- + Gang involvement often starts in middle school years and is heavily influenced by peers.



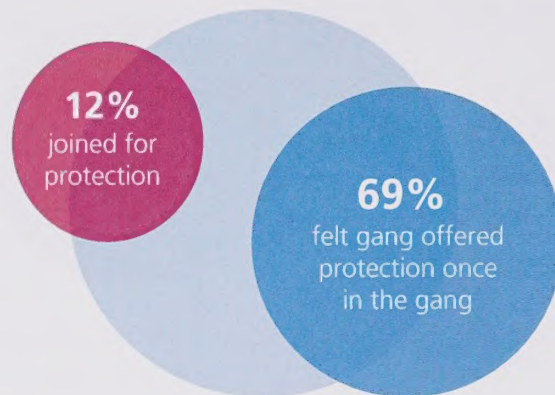
- + While only around one in three gang members/associates said their families didn't care or were in favor of their gang involvement; almost half or more than half felt that their neighborhood or other youth in the community were neutral or positive in regard to it.

32% say family don't care or are in favor of gang involvement

47% say people in neighborhood don't care or are in favor of gang involvement

57% say being a gang member is at least somewhat important to young people in their neighborhood

- + Youth may not join a gang initially for protection, but they perceive they need protection after they do join.



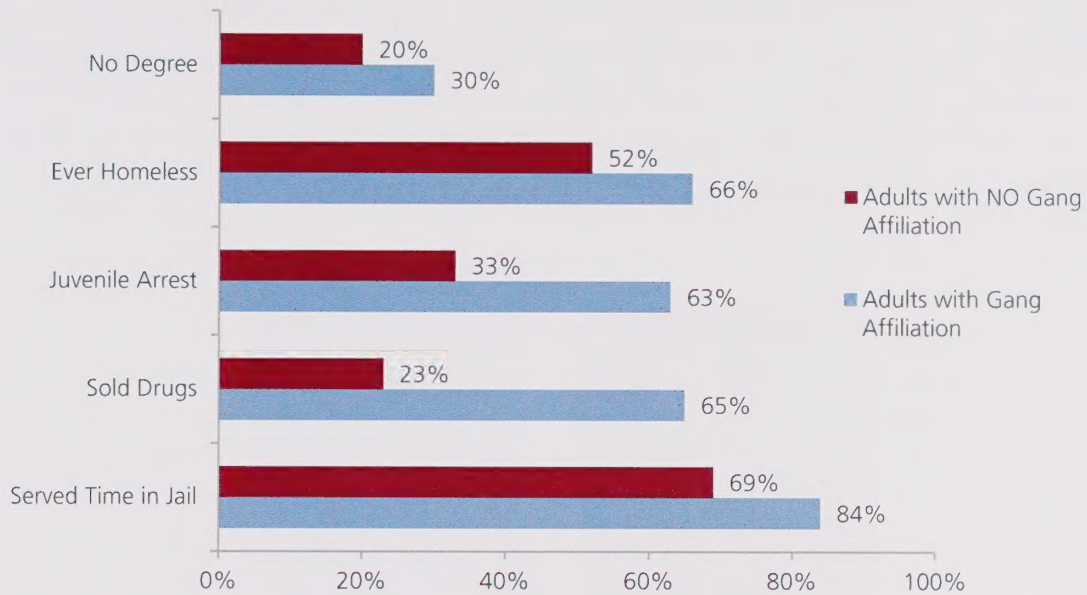
- + Half of gang members report carrying a gun and most say it is easy to get.



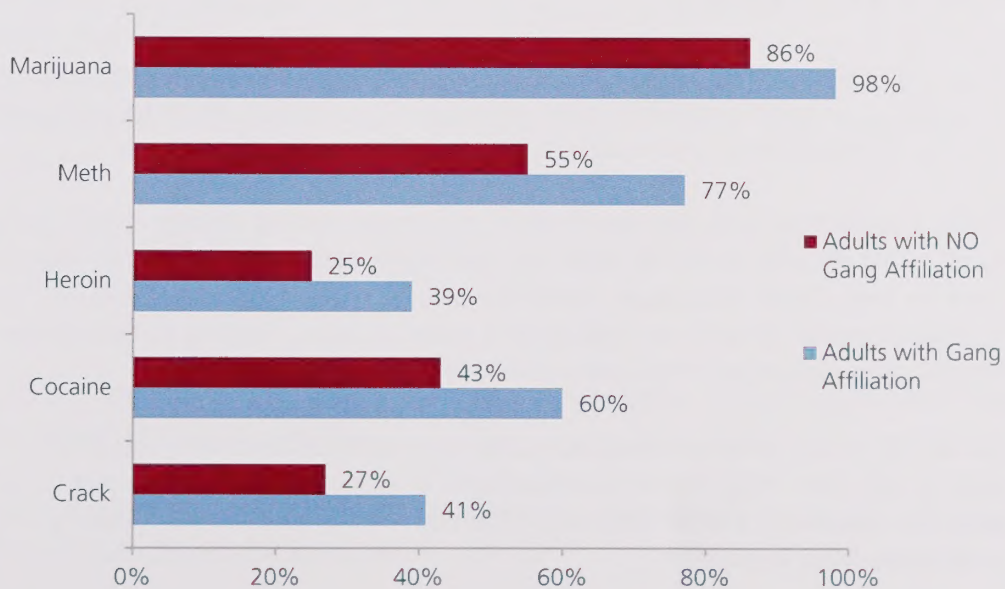
- + 86 percent of gang members say they participate in illegal activities with their gang, which most often include fighting, stealing, tagging, and vandalism.



- + Arrestees with a gang affiliation differ significantly from those with no affiliation in some key ways, including having more needs in some areas (e.g., not having a high school degree, history of homelessness) and more criminal justice contact (e.g., having an arrest as a juvenile, history of drug distribution, history of serving time in jail).



- + Adult arrestees with a gang affiliation were also more likely to have substance use issues, including being more likely to have experimented with marijuana, meth, heroin, cocaine, and crack.



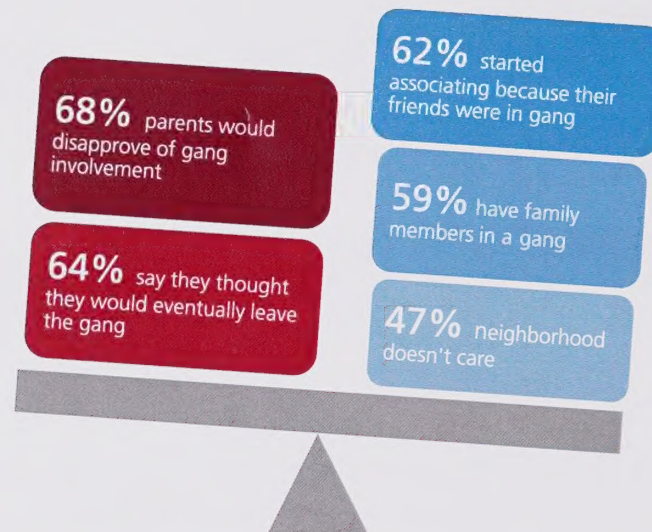
+ Most gang members eventually leave the gang lifestyle. Around one in three (31%) of those still in said they want to get out now and two-thirds (64%) said they thought they would leave eventually. Only one in ten (10%) said they could not leave if they wanted to.

Number 1 reason why gang members/associates gave for stopping hanging out?

52% just grew tired of it

Prevents gang involvement

Supports gang involvement



Valuable Takeaways...

- Gang membership/association can start in middle school and parental disapproval alone may not be enough to counter peer influence. Educational efforts for both youth and parents that start early are important parts of a comprehensive strategy.
- Gang involvement does not last forever and some current members may be open to leaving this lifestyle. It is important for community systems to examine if opportunities exist to help these individuals transition into a more productive lifestyle. Strategies include recognizing when an individual is ready to leave, helping to remove barriers to success, and supporting these individuals with adult responsibilities.
- According to the gang members/associates interviewed, guns are frequently carried and easy to get. Law enforcement is encouraged to continue to explore ways to get illegal guns off the street and to work with the community to ensure retaliatory violence is avoided as often as possible.

Study Background: In 2013, a total of 926 adults were interviewed as part of SAM and provided a valid urine sample. Of these, 254 (27%) reported ever being a gang member or associate and 148 (16%) reported this membership/association within the past five years. An addendum to the SAM interview focusing on gang activities was completed with 137 of these adult arrestees, including 98 males and 39 females. Just over one-third of these individuals described themselves as Hispanic (39%) or White (38%), 21 percent Black, and 1 percent other. For the juveniles, almost half (47%) of the 134 interviewed with a valid urine sample reported gang membership or association and 43 addenda were completed, which included 33 males (32 who provided a urine sample and 1 who was unable to) and 10 females. The ethnic distribution for the juveniles with gang membership/affiliation differed from the adults, with 53 percent describing themselves as Hispanic, 31 percent as Black, 13 percent as White, and 3 percent as other. Overall, 61 percent reported a current affiliation and 39 percent a former (with no difference by age group or gender) and 46 percent described themselves as a member and 54 percent as an associate; males were significantly more likely to report membership than females (53% versus 27%). As part of the interview, a specific definition of gang affiliation was not given to arrestees, allowing the individuals being interviewed to decide for themselves how they should be categorized. However, interviewers were instructed to include individuals who identified themselves as “skinheads” or “taggers”.

Acknowledgements: This SANDAG CJ In Brief is part of a series of reports highlighting findings from data collected as part of the SAM program. As part of this project, adult and juvenile arrestees are approached within 48 hours of their arrest (and booking) to participate in an interview regarding their drug use and other recent behaviors. This effort would not be possible without the cooperation of the San Diego County Sheriff’s and Probation Departments, and the funding support of the California Border Alliance Group, County of San Diego, and SANDAG member agencies.

✚ To learn more about the SAM project and access other current reports and aggregate data, please visit sandag.org/sam.

✚ Recommended Citation: Burke, C. (2014). *Gang Involvement Among San Diego County Arrestees*. San Diego, CA: SANDAG

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